

Resource Advisory Committee Meeting July 22, 2010

RAC Members:

Jerry Paxton – Carbon County (Chair)
Arla Strasser – Carbon County
Linda Fleming – Carbon County
Sonja Macys – Routt County
Barbara Vasquez – Jackson County
Duane Short – Albany County
Jeff Fry – Routt County

John Rich – Jackson County (Vice Chair)
Win Dermody - Routt County
Jack Berger – Carbon County
Jerry Schmidt – Albany County
Doug Monger – Routt County
Ron Iversen – Carbon County (Alternative)

Forest Service:

Phil Cruz
Bob Sprentall
Diann Ritschard
Melissa Martin
Mike Wright

Public Attendees:

Don Brinkman
Connie Brinkman

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 2 at 9:30 in Saratoga.

ASSIGNMENTS

- New Project Priority Spreadsheet – **Melissa Martin (attached to these notes)**
- Letter to Sleeping Giant Industries – **Sonja Macys**
- Discuss Jackson County projects with county commissioners; initiate RAC voting process
- **John Rich**

DECISIONS

- \$10,000 will be put in a pot for travel reimbursement to be used over the next four years. Each county will contribute an appropriate percentage (based on their total dollars).

NEXT MEETING TOPICS

- Selection of RAC Member to replace Jerry Heggie, Albany County
- Discuss how to provide feedback to project proponents

MEETING NOTES

RAC Overview - Phil Cruz

The purposes of the RAC funds are to re-support the needs of counties, invest in land, create employment opportunities, and improve cooperative relationships among people who use and care for National Forests. Although the Secure Rural School and Community Self-Determination Act (Act) states that at least 50% of all Title II funds should be spent on road maintenance and watershed restoration projects, the RAC has a great deal of flexibility in terms

of project selection. Project examples include: roads, trails, improvements to soil productivity, ecosystem health, watershed restoration, wildlife/fish habitat, noxious weeds, etc.

Jerry Paxton added that his goal for the meeting is to narrow the field down regarding project selection, fill in holes where information is missing, find out the NEPA status, etc. He doesn't anticipate reviewing and making a decision on every project; the group can, however, make good headway given the available information.

Phil re-iterated his commitment to do his best to ensure that any money generated in a particular county stay in that county. Counties do have the ability to donate some of their funding to another county if necessary or desired.

Comments/Questions

♣ There is confusion about timber harvest and sale; i.e., how products are cut and sold. (Win D)

Response: Timber projects can qualify for selection – there are, however, certain requirements for quantifying utilization. Those requirements ensure thoughtful use of the material and they provide a tracking mechanism.

RAC Member Resignation

Jerry Paxton indicated that we have a resignation from Jerry Heggie (Albany County). What process do we use to replace the position and who should it be? **Response:** There are RAC alternates that have already been approved by the Secretary – we should consider moving one of them in before we get too far into the process. Jim Ficke would qualify from a timber perspective (Heggie's category) but we need to be cognizant of equity and county distribution. If an alternate can't or doesn't want to assume membership status, look at who applied before and see if they're still interested in participating on the RAC.

Tabled questions

♣ Is the point to get equity or to get qualified, interested people? If the Secretary approves a person for a particular category, does the alternate have to qualify for that category?

Response: We have a quorum for now, so we can table the discussion at the moment. Revisit the issue at the next RAC meeting.

Budget/Project Discussion

Jerry Paxton stated that we should look at the budget and decide how we should focus the meeting, i.e., should we focus on what we can fund right now or should we be looking at money we don't have yet? **Response:** Phil indicated that it's up to the group how they want to allocate the dollars. You are free to recommend projects for 08/09 only or you can look to the future and out-year plan. Future monies will be forthcoming.

Side Group Discussion: Linda Fleming pointed out that we are working with one pool of money to be distributed across four counties; Carbon County would have had a bigger share of the dollars, based on lost taxes, had the RAC not been formed. Win Dermody added that Title II dollars are generated for the counties; the counties are represented by commissioners; therefore, we should pay attention to what those individuals have to say. We should find out what their number one priority is and prioritize those projects.

Barbara Vasquez stated that what Win just said suggests that certain RAC members are more important than other members. Jerry Paxton indicated that the RAC process has checks and balances built into the system; no one's membership is more important than another's. Phil has committed to working with the commissioners; their interests will be represented the same way any other RAC member's would be.

Jack Berger pointed out that some projects are ready to go while others need NEPA clearance or have missing information. He suggested that we focus on those that are ready first and wait to make decisions on others until either the NEPA is done or the holes are filled in.

Sonja Macys stated that she was under impression that we'd focus on 08/09 dollars first and get some tangible results under our belt. She would feel more comfortable about spending those dollars first and then look at future opportunities. Jerry Paxton concurred. Jerry Schmidt indicated that it wouldn't hurt to look to the future – not make it a focus – but to provide momentum.

Doug Monger commented that he didn't see anything in the forms that would make him want to take his dollars and contribute them elsewhere (other than Routt County). He questioned how closely we need to abide by spending by county. Jerry Schmidt added that there could be a project somewhere that may benefit multiple counties – we need to bear that in mind when making funding decisions. He further indicated that he would want to know if a county commissioner or the Forest Service has a pet project and why. He or the RAC may not agree with the project, but the knowledge would be important.

Phil restated that you (the RAC) are at liberty to run yourselves how you want and allocate the dollars how you desire. The Forest Service will work with what is recommended.

Barbara Vasquez stated that the Rangers were supposed to present their projects at this meeting. Phil Cruz indicated that there wasn't consensus to do this and that their priorities were generated behind the scenes. What we have is their priority list, albeit unranked. There are counties wherein there are more projects than money available – so the priorities aren't real clear.

Jerry Paxton asked if the Sleeping Giant project qualifies as it could provide multiple benefits. **Response:** Due to the nature of the proposal (buying equipment rather than doing work on the ground) it is unlikely that it would qualify. Doug Monger added that he likes the concept (innovative idea), but he fears isolating that firm versus knowing if there are other companies who could do a better job. Sonja also added that contributing money to them would be analogous to funding a start-up company – what if it fails? **Decision:** Take the project off the table for now, but provide them (Sleeping Giant) with some feedback. Sonja volunteered to write a letter and to send it to the group for comments.

Barbara Vasquez suggested taking all of the little projects (small price tags) and putting them in one bucket. Win added that it would be good to discuss big projects first. Sonja commented that one way to advertise the RAC's accomplishments is through the projects we fund – we could get a good message out by funding some of the smaller projects. This would be a good way to show success in a shorter amount of time.

John Rich brought up the ditch project and asked how wide the right-of-way (ROW) is.

Response: Phil Cruz said that not all ROW's are the same width – it would be on a case-by-case basis. He further indicated that the Forest Service doesn't want to take over the Permittee's work, adding, however, that we're out of the normal given the beetle situation. Consequently, we've been contributing more than we normally would. Jerry Schmidt added that a little up-front help could reap huge rewards later (prevention of catastrophic/irretrievable situations). Linda Fleming stated that, from an historical perspective, she believes that the ditch project needs attention.

Jerry Paxton asked if we should discuss the projects county by county. He suggested that the group break into smaller county groups.

Group Break-out (groups met by county to discuss project priorities)

Group Reporting:

Jackson County: Barbara reported that they looked at the budget for 08/09 and decided to stop selecting projects when they reached their budget. She mentioned that John has a lot of concerns about road decommissioning because the project proposal wasn't detailed enough. They would like to know more about road locations and reasons for the closures. If duplicate routes are being targeted, then decommissioning is a good thing; if not, then the routes need to be scrutinized more closely. Projects they decided on include, in order of priority: 1) Outdoor education (\$5,000; 2010-11) – this project would have a lot of community support and benefits would be reaped by many; 2) Ninegar Creek realignment (\$21,000; 2010-14) – although this is a small project, it would have a big community impact; 3) Grizzly/Helena Trail Improvement (z\$8,400; 2010- 15) – the improvements would be on private land, primarily in terms of hazard tree removal. This is a heavily used trail, and the project would benefit ORV users; 4) Pitch Pine Fuels Treatment (\$28,750; 2010-9) – This project doesn't have matching funds or partners; it is an individual who can't afford hazard tree removal. Tree removal would create a good fire break; 5) Grizzly/Helena Trail Crossing (\$113,000; 2010-18) – This is the Parks District highest priority. It is a very popular dirt bike/ORV trail that is important to the Forest/users/economy of Walden. There is a need to get across some wetlands, most likely with a bridge that would require a special design, and a need for bank stabilization/restoration. Any money contributed by the RAC would partially fund a project that already has funds committed. One major problem, though, is that the NEPA has not been completed; we could maybe consider it in future years.

Barbara indicated that she and John were in firm agreement about projects 1 – 3 and that there was some disagreement about projects 4/5. Given that two Jackson County RAC members were absent, they would like to discuss projects 4/5 in more detail, and with county commissioners, prior to making a commitment. A motion was put forward and seconded to accept projects 1 – 3 contingent upon county support.

DECISION: A group decision is deferred for now and will be voted upon by email in an effort to move forward. John Rich will initiate the county discussion and voting process.

Carbon County: Linda Fleming indicated that Carbon County has decided to table the ditch clearing project for now because there is the potential for too many conflicts with private

landowners, permittees, etc. Their projects, in order of priority, include: 1) East Fork Encampment River (\$40,000; 2010-2) – this project is a top priority and has a fairly high match with high participation. As a caution, there may be one or two issues with NEPA; 2) Cook Spring Development Reconstruction (\$2,790; 2010-10) – This project would not require much funding, and it would be a “good bang for the buck.” 3) MBR Road decommissioning (\$100,000; 2010-13) – Similar to Jackson County, they would like more information (i.e., which roads, locations, etc). They may consider it more closely after more information is available; 4) Ryan Park Roads and Fire Protection (\$90,000; 2010-16) – Again, they have some questions. More information regarding easements is needed before a decision can be reached. Linda indicated that Carbon County may want to hold some of their funding, if that’s possible, to keep for future years or to contribute to other counties.

DECISION: Jerry Paxton motioned and Arla Strasser seconded to move forward with projects 1 and 2 for now. Motion carried.

Routt County: There are four projects unique to Routt County, with the Buffalo Pass Road being the highest priority. Selecting this project would expend most of Routt County’s dollars. Routt County’s projects, in order of priority, include: 1) Buffalo Pass Road Improvement (\$100,000; 2010-3) – This project is a high priority for both the county and the Forest Service. The \$100,000 would fund the worst 2 ½ miles of the road; 2) NFSR 225 Travel Management (\$100,500; 2010-5) – This project has several positives – the NEPA is complete, it seems to meet a lot of the Title II criteria, and it has a strong monitoring component. However, given the above priority, they can’t agree to contribute dollars right now; 3) Hahns Peak Lake Accessible Trail/Fishing Piers (\$20,000; 2010-12) – Routt County believes that the ADA component is a high priority. *Linda Fleming indicated that Carbon County may be willing to contribute toward the Hahns Peak Lake project since it’s right in Carbon County’s back door and would benefit many users. They would want to contribute toward the ADA portion of the project but not the trail decommissioning portion of it. That would be a waste of money as another trail would likely take its place;* 4) NFSR 329 Decommissioning (\$14,500; 2010 – 19) – They would like to know more about road decommissioning projects in general (i.e., to see them on the ground). Neither of the shared projects (MBR Road Decommissioning/Ditch project) ranked high; they need more information.

DECISION: A motion was made and seconded that the number 1 project is Buffalo Pass. Motion carried.

Albany County: Albany County has four projects proposed, two of which (ditch/ MBR Road Decommissioning) overlap with all counties. Albany County would like to: 1) fund the MBR Road Decommissioning (\$25,000 of the \$100,000; 2010-13); 2) fund a portion of the MBR Ditch Clearing project (\$2,000 of the \$190,500; 2010-1) - This would be a good investment to ward off future problems; and 3) fund a portion of the Lake Creek Fish Passage Restoration project (\$49,000 to replace culverts; 2010-4). Currently only 10% of the total cost is being matched from other contributors (\$23,000) – the RAC should request more funding from contributors (50% match) before we commit our \$49,000; 4) Albany County is not excited about the Range Aspen Restoration project. The project is located in a high fire occurrence area and doesn’t seem to the goals and objectives of Title II projects. Further, aspen regeneration appears to be occurring naturally.

Jerry Schmidt stated that Albany County is the only group that approved the ditch project. He suggested that we make it a model (pilot) for future decisions (i.e., see how it works and if it's worthwhile to pursue others in the future). Sonja stated that the project money was for on-the-ground work only, not monitoring and documentation – the group may want to put more money towards it. Duane Short suggested having all counties pitch in some money to help monitor the pilot.

DECISION: A motion was made and seconded to approve projects 1 – 3. Motion carried. Phil will call Tim Sullivan discuss the project list; he anticipates agreement.

County Commissioner Discussions

What kind of timeframe are we looking at regarding the need to talk to other county commissioners? **Response:** Regarding Albany County, Phil Cruz could participate in a phone conference during a regularly scheduled board meeting. This would not take long. Doug Monger (Routt) indicated that he had already presented the information to the county commissioners; he doesn't feel the need to have a special meeting. Carbon County (Jerry Paxton) would like to reserve the opportunity to discuss the projects; again, this shouldn't take long. John Rich would like to discuss Jackson County projects with the commissioners – see Jackson County discussion (page 4).

RAC Reimbursement

Diann indicated that we had agreed previously to reimburse RAC Members; consequently, we should set aside some money for that purpose. RAC members will get forms via email for reimbursement. Win Dermody motioned to put \$10,000 in a pot to be used over the next 4 years for reimbursement. Each county would contribute a percentage based on the money they have to spend.

DECISION: Motion carried; \$10,000 will be put in a “reimbursement pot.”

General Discussions

Phil Cruz indicated that there are three ways for the project work to be accomplished: contract, agreement, and Forest Service account (recent change). This program was never intended to be a “pay for Forest Service salary” program. We need to be careful with how projects are accomplished as there may be concerns regarding the perception of paying the Forest Service to work on things that they should already be doing. On the flip side, projects could be accomplished more quickly that way than going through contracting. We often run into delays and/or have problems with timing when contracts are used.

Future project submissions: We should discuss the “sexiness” of the project with the proponent and have them highlight what makes the project unique. There are some good projects that may have had a higher probability of getting selected if the presentation had been more complete.

Question: How do we get the money filtered to the correct people to get the projects accomplished? (Arla Strasser) **Response:** Phil indicated that it's in a special Forest Service account.

Next RAC Meeting

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, September 2 in Saratoga at 9:30.

Meeting Objective: Look at updated information from projects where there are questions, fit those into the mix, and look at out-year planning.

Anyone whose project didn't get funded should get some kind of feedback. How to provide feedback will be discussed at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned.